

## HOW ARE PEER NAVIGATORS RESPONDING TO SOCIAL CARE NEEDS WITHIN AN AUSTRALIAN CONTEXT

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**Background:** Biomedical discourses frequently normalise and conceal the social complexities and inequalities experienced by some People Living with HIV (PLHIV). Despite expanding access to treatment, HIV related inequalities persist and continue to impact access to healthcare for PLHIV. Peer navigation (PN), a community-based model of care, seeks to recognise the socially embedded nature of HIV and support PLHIV to navigate the social barriers to healthcare.

**Methods:** This study involved the evaluation of Australia's first PN program run by Queensland Positive People (QPP). QPP's community-based PN program links people newly diagnosed or those choosing to re-engage in care with PNs across Queensland to provide support across the continuum of care. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with 19 PNs operating across Queensland to explore how they supported PLHIV and sought to navigate their broader social and healthcare needs.

**Results:** PNs described a broad range of activities undertaken to navigate barriers to care for their clients. These activities fell under two broad categories: functional and relational support. Functional support was provided to address systems level issues, particularly linked to system shortfalls. For example, co-ordinating care across multiple service providers, including welfare and housing support, establishing linkages to care and providing health information. Relational support reflected the affective support provided to address issues such as disclosure, social isolation, stigma and discrimination. Relational support drew on PNs' experiential knowledge of HIV to support clients to navigate the challenges associated with diagnosis and HIV self-management.

**Conclusion:** PN is a growing HIV service delivery model, both in Australia and internationally. This study highlights the importance of PNs providing both functional supports to address systems level barriers to care and relational support to address issues relating to the experience of HIV.

